SNIFF
SNIFF
COFFEE!!
AND A CINNAMON BAGEL?!
I'M STILL ANGRY AT YOU!!
YOINK!
OKAY.
I'LL WAIT IN THE HALL.
SHF

PLOP
...GUYS, I CAN'T HELP WITH THE SET-UP—I STILL HAVE TO GET THE EXTRA PASSES AND MEET THEM.
OKAY, GOOD LUCK!
UM! DO YOU WANT ANYTHING FOR WHEN WE DO A FOOD RUN?
NO, THANKS! WE'RE HAVING A FAMILY LUNCH, I THINK! ...IF I LIVE TO SEE THAT...
OKAY, WELL, CALL IF YOU NEED ANYTHING!!
SURE! BYE!
...

CLICK

SHF

... REMEMBER WHEN WE FIRST MET? TWO YEARS AGO?
YOU BUMPED INTO ME. YOU WERE CRYING.
BECAUSE MY THEN-BOYFRIEND SAID SOMETHING THAT HURT ME VERY MUCH.
AND YOU SAID... YOU SAID: "IF HE LOVES YOU, HE SHOULDN'T DO THINGS THAT HURT YOU."
...

AND I KNOW, I KNOW YOU DON'T *MEAN* TO HURT ME.
BUT YOU DO.
...
I WARNED YOU. I'M NOT A NICE PERSON.
!!

...IS THAT YOUR REASON?
OR YOUR EXCUSE?
...

SIGH
...COME ON, LET ME GO.
I WON'T RUN AWAY, I PROMISE.
TOO LATE FOR THAT NOW.
TELL YOU WHAT, BUY ME HOT CHOCOLATE AND CAKE AT THE CAFÉ DOWNSTAIRS AND WE'LL CALL IT EV--

...
... UM, OKAY. YEAH... LET'S DO BETTER TODAY.
DEAL. THINK THE CAFÉ IS OPEN THIS EARLY?

S-SO, THIS IS IT!
...GIRL, UNLESS THERE IS AN HONEST-TO-GOD MUSEUM TUCKED UP INSIDE OF HERE... YOU'VE GOT SERIOUS EXPLAINING TO DO.
YOU DELIBERATELY LEAD ME TO THINK THIS WAS A RESPECTFUL CULTURAL EXHIBITION.
A-ACTUALLY, IT'S PRETTY SELF-EXPLANATORY, S-SO...
IT... IT /S...
POP CULTURE IS CULTURE TOO, SO...
!!
...DOES HER MOTHER KNOW SHE WEARS THIS?!!
DO YOU WEAR THIS?!
...WHAT? NO!
I DID TRY ON A COSTUME YESTERDAY...
BUT FOR ONLY 10 MINUTES!! I- IN THE PRIVACY OF OUR HOTEL ROOM!

I DON'T WANT YOU TO EVER...
AH!! AUNT JAZ, THERE YOU ARE!!
HEY, KIDS, LOOK WHO IT IS!
AUNT B!
HEY, BABY, HOW YOU DOING?! IT'S BEEN SO LOOOONG! WHY DON'T YOU EVER VISIT?!
O-OH, YOU KNOW--SCHOOL AND STUFF...
I KNOW, I KNOW...
ALL THAT AND YOUR MOTHER HATES ME...
UH...
...
SO THIS IS IT, THEN?
YES. AS YOU CAN SEE, SHE COMPLETELY MISREP-RESENTED THE...
AWESOME.

...HUM?
KIDS--ALL THAT STUFF I SAID ABOUT THIS BEING A MUSEUM?
TURNS OUT I WAS KIDDING.
YAAAY!
YESSS
YOU ACTUALLY WANT TO GO IN?
ARE YOU SAYING WE CAN'T?
UH, WELL, NO...
SUP, LADIES.
IT'S SETTLED THEN! B, YOU'RE THE NATIVE HERE--LEAD THE WAY!
...
MAMA, LOOK, A NINJA!!
THANK YOU FOR COMING, AUNT JAZ...

AND HERE'S OUR TABLE! WE ARE SHARING WITH FRIENDS.
THIS IS MONICA AND RAJ.
NICE TO MEET YOU!
SO IT'S YOUR DRAWING ON ALL THE T-SHIRTS? WOW.
AND YOU DREW THIS BOOK? EVERY PAGE?
YES, CHRISTIE WRITES AND I DRAW.
B, I KNEW THAT YOU DREW... BUT I HAD NO IDEA YOU WERE GOOD.
WHY AREN'T YOU DOING THIS FOR A LIVING?!
UM.
HA HA, THAT'S WHAT WE KEEP ASKING HER!! SHE'D TOTALLY ROCK!

...UM, WELL, IT'S, IT'S NOT THAT EASY... AND, AND, I'M GOING TO SCHOOL, SO...
WHY? BECAUSE SHE WANTS TO HAVE A FUTURE THAT DOESN'T INVOLVE WELFARE.
I ALWAYS SAID KIDS SHOULD HAVE HOBBIES.
HMMM, CUTE.
KEEPS THEM OFF THE STREETS.
...
I'D LIKE TO BUY ONE OF EACH BOOK, PLEASE, AND THIS PRINT.
SURE! I'LL GET YOU A BAG.
MOM, CAN I GET THIS BOOKMARK?
YOU CAN JUST TAKE THAT ONE, HONEY.

MOM, THAT WAS COMPLETELY UNNECESSARY.
JUST TELLING THINGS AS THEY ARE.
YOU TOTALLY TALKED DOWN TO MY FRIENDS! THEY PUT A LOT OF EFFORT INTO THIS, IT'S AN IMPORTANT THING TO THEM!
AND... AND TO ME.
IT'S A USELESS THING. I DON'T WANT YOU TO EVER ATTEND SOMETHING LIKE THIS AGAIN. YOU'RE NOT A KID ANYMORE.
HEY, BETH.
WHAT IS THAT LINE FOR?
UM... OH! THAT'S RIGHT, IT ALREADY STARTED!

THAT'S FOR LIDA'S SIGNING.
SHE IS A FAMOUS NORTH AMERICAN MANGA AUTHOR--CHRISTIE AND I ARE BIG FANS.
THAT HER ART ON THAT HUGE POSTER?
YEAH, IT'S HER LATEST SERIES. IT'S BEING MADE INTO A MOVIE!
NO KIDDING?! A MOVIE, HUH!
YEAH, THEY START SHOOTING IN THE FALL, I THINK.
THOUGH WE'RE AFRAID THEY'RE GOING TO CHANGE IT A LOT AND THAT IT'LL SUCK...
SO SHE'S DONE WELL FOR HERSELF, THEN, HUH?
AND ALL THESE PEOPLE...THEY JUST WAITING FOR AN AUTO-GRAPH?
PRETTY MUCH! SOMETIMES THEY BRING LITTLE GIFTS AND THINGS, TOO. ALSO IT'S FOR THE CHANCE TO MEET HER FACE TO FACE.

...THAT COULD BE YOU UP THERE.
YOUR ART IS BETTER.

I'VE HAD ENOUGH OF THIS CIRCUS!
ARE YOU KIDS DONE YET? CAN WE GO SOMEPLACE CIVILIZED NOW?

...
YEAH, LET'S GRAB SOMETHING TO EAT.

CHAPTER 5

D-4
D'elusion
DO YOU STILL HAVE THE SMALL LACE UMBRELLAS?
NO, ALL SOLD OUT, SORRY.
YOU CAN ORDER ONLINE, HERE IS OUR SITE.

HEY, HOW'S IT GOING?
OH HI, YOU'RE BACK!
HOW'S THE DAY GOING FOR YOU?
SOOOO BORING. AND PEOPLE KEEP ASKING FOR PICTURES. APPARENTLY I LOOK LIKE SOME MANGA CHARACTER..
HEY, DO YOU GUYS NEED HELP? I BET I CAN BULLY SOME GEEKS INTO GIVING UP THEIR MONEY!
HA HA! THANK YOU, BUT I THINK WE'RE GOOD.
AND IT'S PRETTY CROWDED IN HERE WITH ALL THE BOXES...
OH, OKAY.
..CAN I BORROW YOUR CELL PHONE?
SURE!
DON'T BOTHER, HON. HE'S ONLY PICKING UP CALLS FROM ME.

...
...YOU WEREN'T THIS PROTECTIVE WHEN IT WAS ME AND HIM.
YOU WERE PROTECTIVE ENOUGH FOR AN ARMY, SWEETIE. DIDN'T NEED TO.
...
...HARSH, LOVE.
NECESSARY. SORRY...

GET
OFF MY
PLANET
!!
.....

...
OKAY, OUT WITH IT. WHAT'S THE PROBLEM TODAY? YOU'VE BARELY SAID ONE WORD TO ME.
JUST SO YOU'RE CLEAR-- WE DID MAKE UP.
STREETCH
WEE ELL?
...I'M TRYING TO MEND MY WAYS AND THINK OF SOMETHING NICE TO SAY.
...!
HA HA HA HA HA
I THOUGHT I HEARD A TRAIN WRECK!!
HOW'S THE THINKING OF SAYING NICE THINGS GOING FOR YOU?
IT'S EXHAUSTING.

YEAH, TAKES ZERO EFFORT TO BE AN ASS, DOESN'T IT?
YES, WELL. I DON'T WANT TO BRAG, BUT WHEN YOU'VE GOT THE SKILLS...
SURE. MIGHT TAKE A WHILE, THOUGH.
YOU'RE UN-BELIEVABLE.
WILL WE EVER HAVE A CONVERSATION THAT DOESN'T GO THERMO-NUCLEAR?
I'M STICKING AROUND UNTIL THEN.
YOU?
...

WE'LL SEE.
...YOU WERE SUPPOSED TO SAY "YES."
WAS I? MUST'VE MISSED THE MEMO.
YOU SAID WE MADE UP.
YES, BUT YOU'VE YET TO SAY SOMETHING NICE TO ME.
FEEL FREE TO START WITH MY COSTUME.
..."A" FOR EFFORT?
"F" FOR YOURS!!! TRY HARDER!
YOU...!
HEY, HOLD UP A SECOND!
...
RRRIIIP
OOPS.

TICK TOCK
TICK TOCK
. . .
WAAAH!
THERE THERE, NOW.
"SNIFFLE"
DON'T WORRY, NOTHING SOME THREAD AND NEEDLE CAN'T FIX.
BET IT WASN'T SEWED ON PROPERLY, THAT'S WHY...
SO, HE'S BEEN A MEANIE TODAY AGAIN, HAS HE?
THE BOY'S GOT THE SUBTLETY OF A BRICK TO THE HEAD, I DO APOLOGIZE.
..I'M STANDING RIGHT HERE, YOU KNOW
WELL, AT LEAST HE'S BEEN TRYING...
THOUGH I DO FEAR HE MAY RUPTURE A VESSEL OR SOMETHING FROM THE STRAIN...
..STILL STANDING RIGHT HERE. JUST FYI.

WELL, IF HE DOESN'T BEHAVE, YOU JUST LET ME KNOW AND I'LL BEAT HIM UP.
SNORT
DEAL!
HE DOESN'T HIT GIRLS, SO I'D TOTALLY WIN!
...OH HEY, MATT SAID YOU MADE A COSTUME FOR HIM AGAIN, DO YOU HAVE IT HERE?
OH, YES...
?
THE COSTUME ...
AW, FOR CRYING OUT...
S.SOB.
I AM NOT WEARING IT.
BOO HOO HOO
NICE PERFORMANCE, TOO BAD NO ONE'S BUYING!
...YOU'RE NOT REALLY CRYING, ARE YOU?...
...
YOU ARE A STUBBORN ASS!
YOU KNOW HOW LONG IT TOOK ME TO MAKE THAT?!
TWO DAYS BEFORE THE CON. AFTER I SAID I'M NOT COSPLAYING.
DETAILS, SHMETAILS.

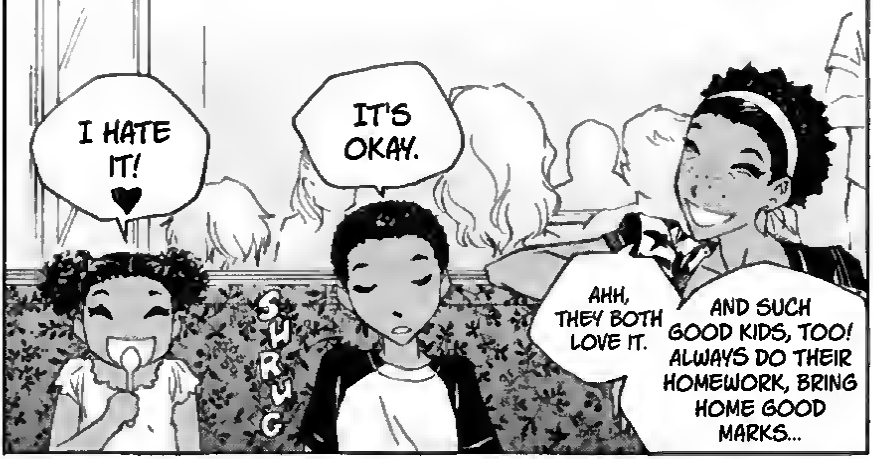
DO YOU WANT HIM TO COSPLAY?
YEAH!!
SEE, MATT?
DO IT FOR YOUR GIRL!
NO WAY IN HELL.
...
...I-I MEAN, UH.
BUT.
?
FINE, I'LL WEAR IT.
H-HE... HE DID IT FOR EMILY, DIDN'T HE?
TOTALLY ...
WE'RE... WE'RE CHOPPED LIVER TO HIM...
...!!

...HUH?
ONLY IF SHE WEARS THAT THING YOU BROUGHT FOR HER.
DANCE
DANCE
TWIRL
TWIRL
EXTORTION-- TWO CAN PLAY THAT GAME.
..HEY, WHAT?
I GOT THE BEST END OF THIS DEAL EVER.
HEH HEH HEH.
QUIT SMIRKING LIKE THAT!! WHAT THING?
YOU'LL SEE

...

Chez Chili's
....OH, WE USED TO ALWAYS FIGHT, JUST ALL THE TIME.
STAB STAB
...USED TO? HEH.
WELL, IT'S WHAT SISTERS DO, YOU KNOW?
HA HA, BEING AN ONLY CHILD... NOT REALLY!
AW, SISTERS ARE AWESOME! BEST PART OF MY CHILDHOOD WAS HAVING MARY THERE TO PICK ON.
...!
TWITCH
....A HA HA!
HA...?

I ALWAYS WON, AS YOU'LL RECALL.
HA HA, IT'S TRUE, YOU DID. WHICH USUALLY INVOLVED CHASING ME INTO THE BATHROOM UNTIL MOM CAME HOME.
YOU SHOULD'VE SEEN YOUR GRANDMA, SHE WAS ALL...
"YOU TWO ARE GOING TO GET ALONG IF IT KILLS YOU!"
SO NOW HERE WE ARE. GETTING ALONG IF IT KILLS US, HA HA! RIGHT, MARY?
WHERE DID THAT GIRL GO WITH THE CHECK ..?
DAMN LAZY WAITERS ...
MAYBE YOU SCARED HER OFF WOULDN'T BE A FIRST
SLURP
S-SO!!
S-SO, HOW IS SCHOOL GOING FOR YOU GUYS?


I HATE IT!
IT'S OKAY.
SHRUG
AHH, THEY BOTH LOVE IT.
AND SUCH GOOD KIDS, TOO! ALWAYS DO THEIR HOMEWORK, BRING HOME GOOD MARKS...

...AND, WONDER! I DON'T EVEN NAG LIKE SOME.
SOME

AND HOW'S SCHOOL GOING FOR YOU? DO YOU LIKE IT?
...
MUST'VE GOTTEN A PRETTY GOOD TASTE BY NOW.

GLOW
GLOW
UM. IT'S VERY INTERESTING, THERE ARE A LOT OF CHALLENGING SUBJECTS, SO I...
SHE'S GOT A 4.0 GPA THIS YEAR.
WOW, REALLY? THAT'S AMAZING!

...BUT DO YOU *LIKE* IT?
THINK YOU FOUND YOUR CALLING? OR NEED TO LOOK SOME MORE?
...
I GET GOOD MARKS, SO..
SHE CAN'T EVEN LIE, THAT'S SOME STELLAR TRAINING THERE, SISTER.
DID YOU REMEMBER TO INCLUDE SOME FREE WILL?
STAY OUT OF THIS.
OH, SPEAKING OF CAREERS! KIDDOS BOTH HAD CAREER DAYS ALREADY!
C'MON, TELL US WHO WANTS TO BE WHAT.
I WANNA BE A JOURNALIST!
...!
...NO YOU DON'T! YOU SAID YOU WANT TO BE A DOCTOR!
YOU CAN BE THE DOCTOR, *I'M* GONNA BE A JOURNALIST AND TRAVEL THE WORLD AND BE IN NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC AND...

OH YEAH? WELL I...!
HA HA, SO CUTE!! AREN'T THEY JUST ADORABLE?
THEY ARE TOO LOUD.
ALL RIGHT, ALL RIGHT, SHUSH NOW. YOU CAN BOTH WANT TO BE A JOURNALIST.
IT DOESN'T REALLY MATTER ANYWAY, SINCE YOU DON'T GET TO BE WHAT YOU WANT.
...HUH? WHY?
BECAUSE YOU SEE, IT'S MOMMY'S RIGHT TO TELL YOU WHAT TO DO WITH YOUR LIVES. YOU MAY *THINK* YOU'RE INDIVIDUALS, BUT REALLY, YOU'RE JUST EXTENSIONS OF MOMMY, SO YOU HAVE TO DO WHAT MOMMY WANTS.
YOU WANT TO BE AN ARTIST? TOUGH! LAWYERS ARE IN SEASON NOW.

SLAM
WE'RE LEAVING, YOU VIPER.
UM, BYE, AUNT JAZ.
SHF
BETH...
I JUST...
FAMILY IS IMPORTANT, BUT DON'T LOSE SIGHT OF YOURSELF, OKAY? YOU OWE YOURSELF THAT MUCH.
...
THANK YOU.

...WHY CAN'T I BE A JOURNALIST, MOMMY?
I WAS JUST JOKING, HONEY.
YOU CAN BE WHATEVER YOU WANT.
CAN I BE A NINJA?
...
...UH.
...I DON'T THINK THAT'S AN ACTUAL JOB...
NOT ANYMORE..

LAKELAND BANK
...DON'T YOU LISTEN TO YOUR AUNT, HER HEAD'S FULL OF TRASH, EVER SINCE WE WERE KIDS. PUSHING 40 AND SHE STILL GOT NO JOB, USING HER HUSBAND'S CHECKBOOK.
MOM, SHE'S GOT A PSYCHOLOGY AND BUSINESS DEGREE.
SHE'S SO SMART, HOW COME SHE DON'T OWN A BUSINESS, THEN? PLENTY DEPRESSED FOLK THESE DAYS, WILLING TO CHUCK CASH AT SHRINKS.
ALL THIS NONSENSE ABOUT "FOLLOWING YOUR DREAMS." WHAT, SHE GOT MONEY TO GIVE YOU WHEN YOU ARE BROKE AND CAN'T PAY YOUR BILLS?
A STEADY JOB IS WHAT YOU NEED, NOT DREAMS. CAN'T *EAT* DREAMS, CAN'T USE THEM TO PAY RENT.

CAN BE A DEADBEAT, LIKE YOUR FATHER, THOUGH, NO EFFORT THERE!
HE WAS IN SPINS MAGAZINE AGAIN LAST WEEK. SOUNDS LIKE HE'S DOING PRETTY WE--
YOU READ THAT TRASH RAG?! YOU LOOKING FOR NEWS ON HIS SORRY ASS?!
I WASN'T LOOKING, HE WAS ON THE COVER..
LIKE HE COULD EVER KEEP THE MONEY THEY THROW AT HIM!!
...
GRIT

A BIG COMPAN
ME
IS THAT THE RIGHT TURN? ...AH, YES, THERE'S THE PARKING LOT.
...WHAT?
A B-BIG MANGA COMPANY OFFERED ME A JOB. LAST YEAR.
I TURNED THEM DOWN.
BUT THEY ARE HIRING AGAIN AND ARE INTERESTED IN ME, SO I THOUGHT MAYBE...
WELL, TURN THEM DOWN AGAIN, YOU'VE GOT BETTER THINGS TO DO.
...AH, THERE IS THE MAIN ENTRANCE.
I'LL JUST DROP YOU OFF RIGHT THERE, LESS WALKING FOR YOU.
. . .

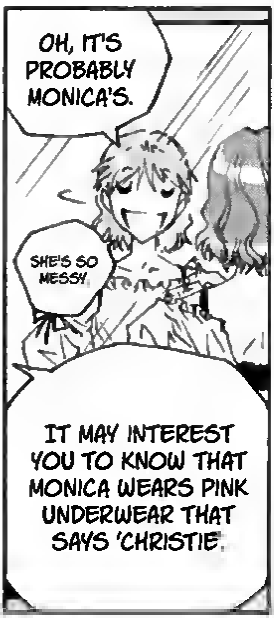
SO YOU'RE COMING HOME FOR A VISIT THIS MONTH?
YES, THE WEEK AFTER NEXT ONE, I ALREADY GOT TIME OFF WORK.
RIGHT. I'LL SEE IF I CAN GET SOME TIME OFF, TOO. WE'LL GO SEE THAT NEW SHOW.
...
...MOM, IF THEY OFFER ME A JOB AGAIN, I'M GOING TO TAKE IT.
...WHAT?

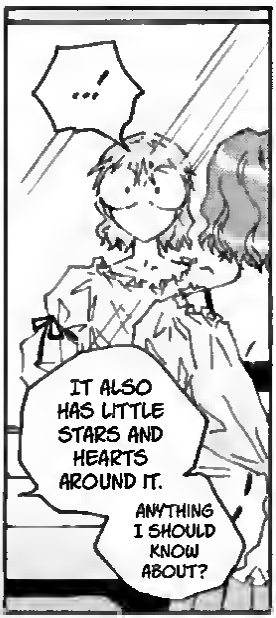
I WOULDN'T QUIT SCHOOL, I'LL STILL FINISH, MARK SAID THEY'D BE WILLING TO GIVE ME A FLEXIBLE SCHEDULE...
OH, HELL, NO.
...AND I'M FAST--I TIMED MYSELF--I COULD DO 10-15 PAGES A MONTH ON TOP OF SCHOOL, MORE IF IT'S DURING THE SUMMER...
I SAID NO.
...IT'D BE JUST LIKE HAVING A PART-TIME JOB, WHICH I DO ANYWAY!!
YOU LISTEN TO ME IF YOU KNOW WHAT'S GOOD FOR YOU!!
I'M TAKING IT AND YOU CAN'T STOP ME!!

MOM...
DON'T CALL ME THAT.
YOU'RE NO DAUGHTER OF MINE.
!!
DON'T COME BACK HOME.
YOU WANT TO DO THIS THING?
YOU'RE ON YOUR OWN.
SLAM
SCREEECH

DA LODGE
WOW.
THIS IS GORGEOUS. HOW DID SHE LEARN TO MAKE THESE SO WELL?! CAN BARELY SEE THE SEAMS...
SELF-TAUGHT, CAN YOU BELIEVE IT? COSTUMING IS JUST SOMETHING SHE ALWAYS DID.
HEE, I WON'T.
...THIS IS SOOOO WELL-MADE... I FEEL LIKE AN AMATEUR.
...SO SHE JUST MADE THIS SPECIFICALLY FOR ME?
DON'T TELL HER I SAID THAT
HEH, YEAH. SHE'S BEEN WAITING TO DRESS YOU UP FOR TWO YEARS.
WELL... SHE WAS AN AMATEUR ONCE, TOO.

AND REALLY, WHAT MATTERS IS WHETHER YOU ENJOYED DOING IT OR NOT.
AND NOT WHAT COSPLAY SNOBS LIKE ME THINK.
MY MY MY, NOW THAT SOUNDED AN AWFUL LOT LIKE AN APOLOGY!
...MAYBE. IT'S ALSO THE TRU--
ZZIP
CRASH
THUD
WHAT WAS THAT?! ARE YOU ALL RIGHT?
...
...FINE. THIS ROOM'S AN OBSTACLE COURSE.
SOMEONE'S SUITCASE IS NO LONGER UPRIGHT, JUST FYI.


OH, IT'S PROBABLY MONICA'S.
SHE'S SO MESSY.
IT MAY INTEREST YOU TO KNOW THAT MONICA WEARS PINK UNDERWEAR THAT SAYS 'CHRISTIE'.


...!
IT ALSO HAS LITTLE STARS AND HEARTS AROUND IT.
ANYTHING I SHOULD KNOW ABOUT?

ARGH!! THAT'S MY SUITCASE!!